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The Illustrated

RAMAYANA

Rama Exiled

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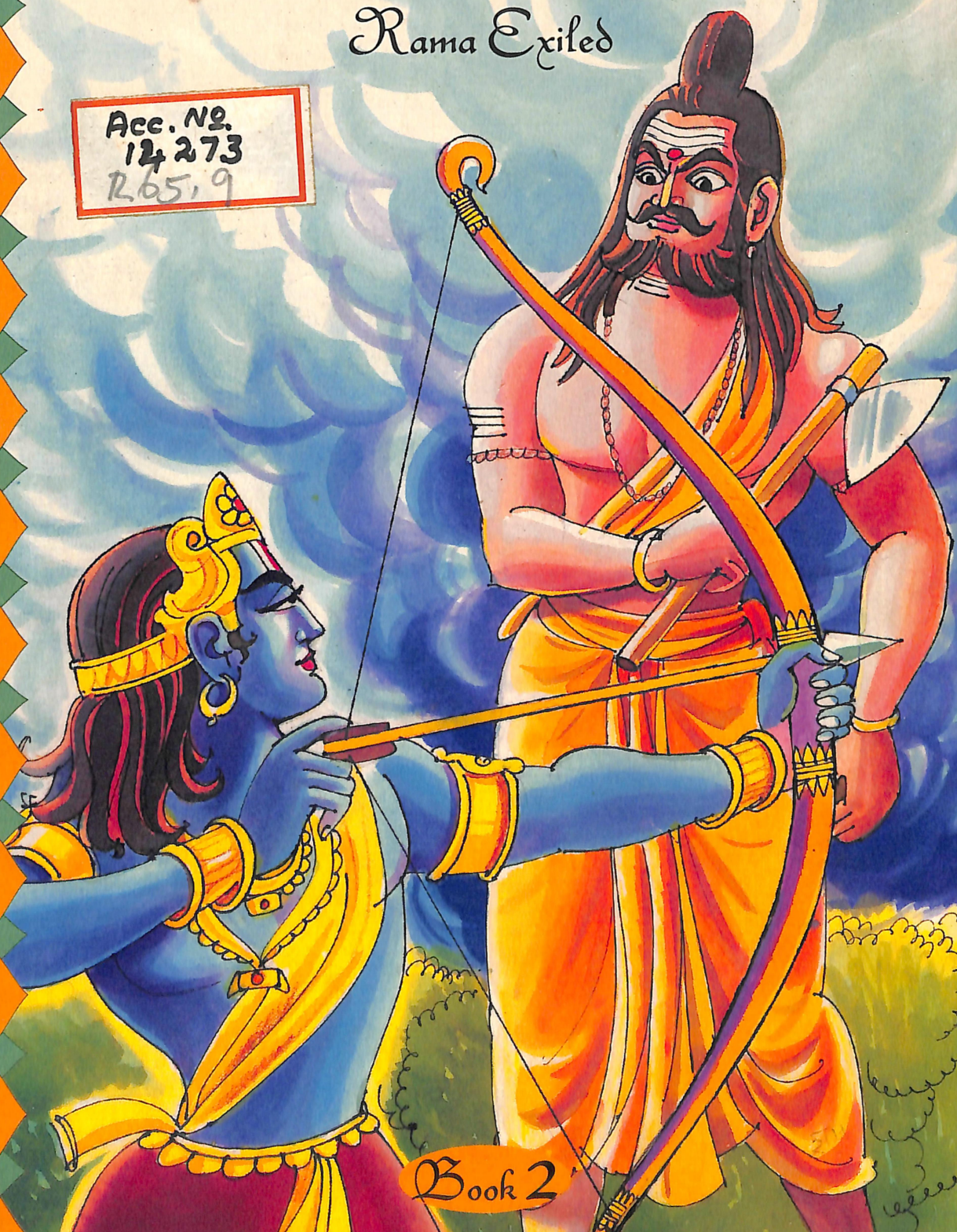

Book 2

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The story so far

Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is born on earth as the son of King Dasaratha of Kosala. His purpose is to slay the demons which are plaguing both heaven and earth. When he is sixteen, the sage Vishwamitra persuades Dasaratha to send Rama to destroy the rakshasas who interrupt his sacrificial ceremonies. Rama, with the help of his brother Lakshmana, is successful in this heroic mission. Vishwamitra then takes the brothers to Mithila in the kingdom of Videha. Here Rama breaks the powerful bow of Rudra, and marries King Janaka's daughter, Seetha. *(See Book 1: Rama's Early Years)*

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18-2

Rama Exiled

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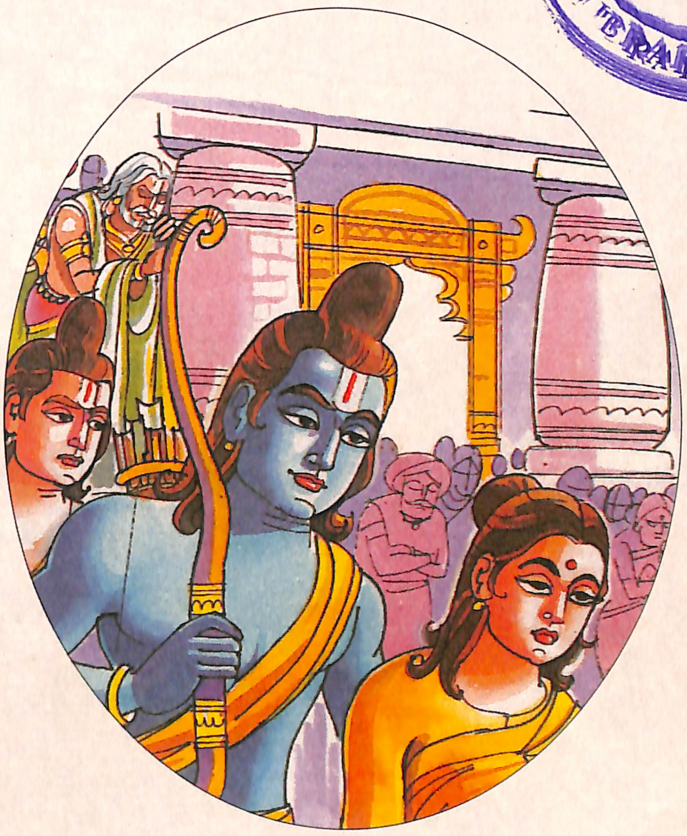

Illustrated by Bujjai

Retold by Chitra Shastri

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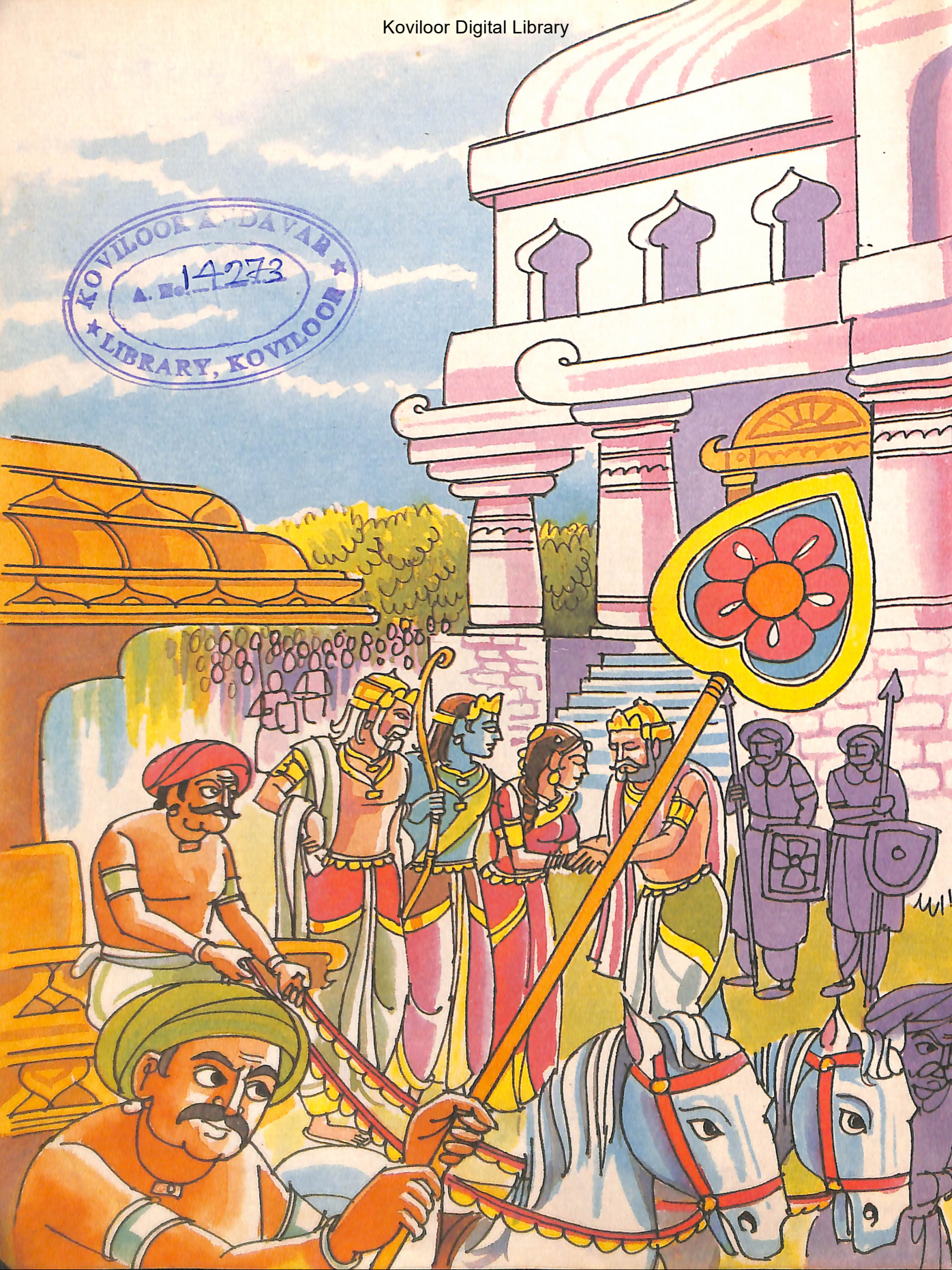

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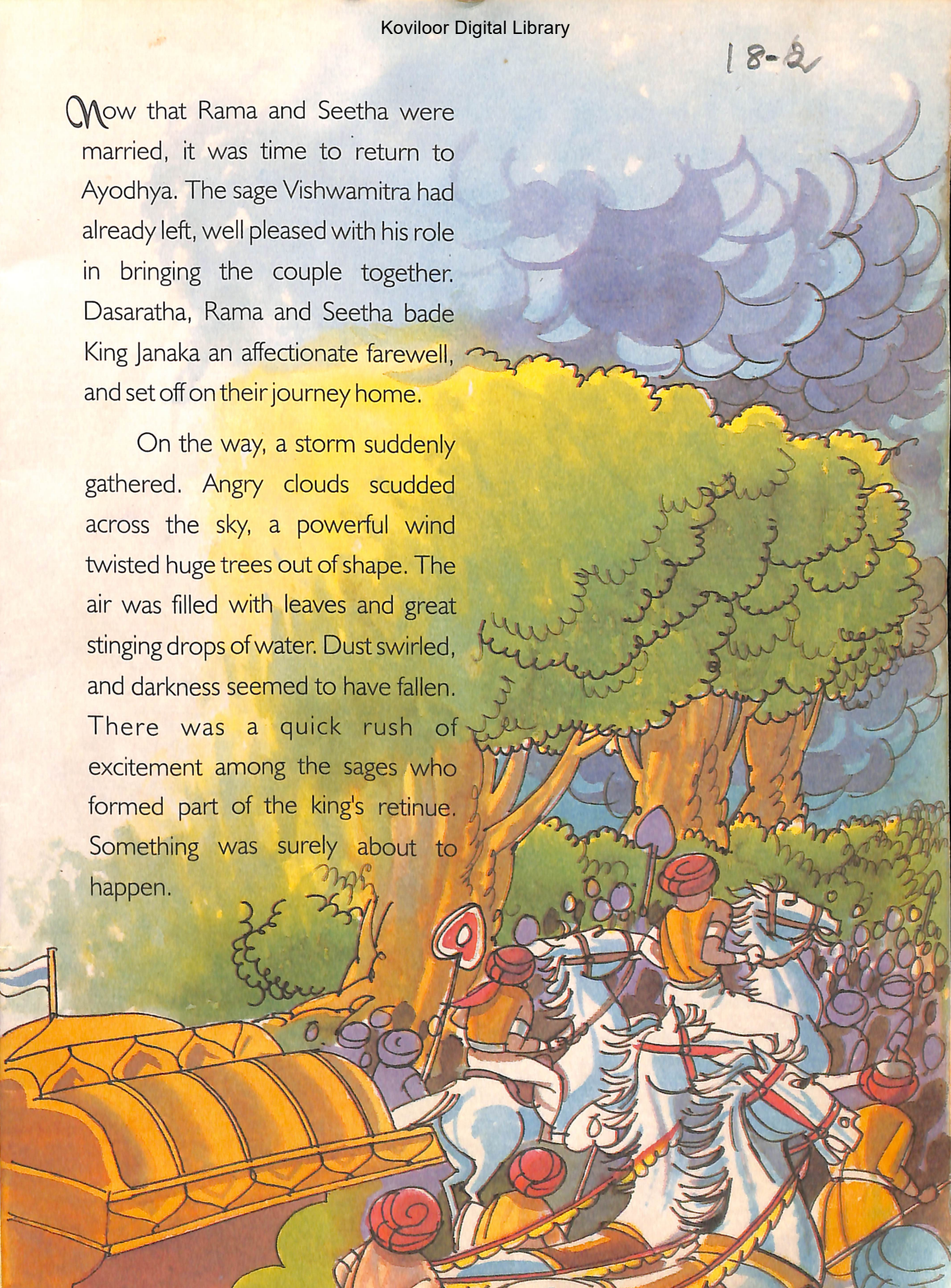
18-2

Now that Rama and Seetha were married, it was time to return to Ayodhya. The sage Vishwamitra had already left, well pleased with his role in bringing the couple together. Dasaratha, Rama and Seetha bade King Janaka an affectionate farewell, and set off on their journey home.

On the way, a storm suddenly gathered. Angry clouds scudded across the sky, a powerful wind twisted huge trees out of shape. The air was filled with leaves and great stinging drops of water. Dust swirled, and darkness seemed to have fallen. There was a quick rush of excitement among the sages who formed part of the king's retinue. Something was surely about to happen.



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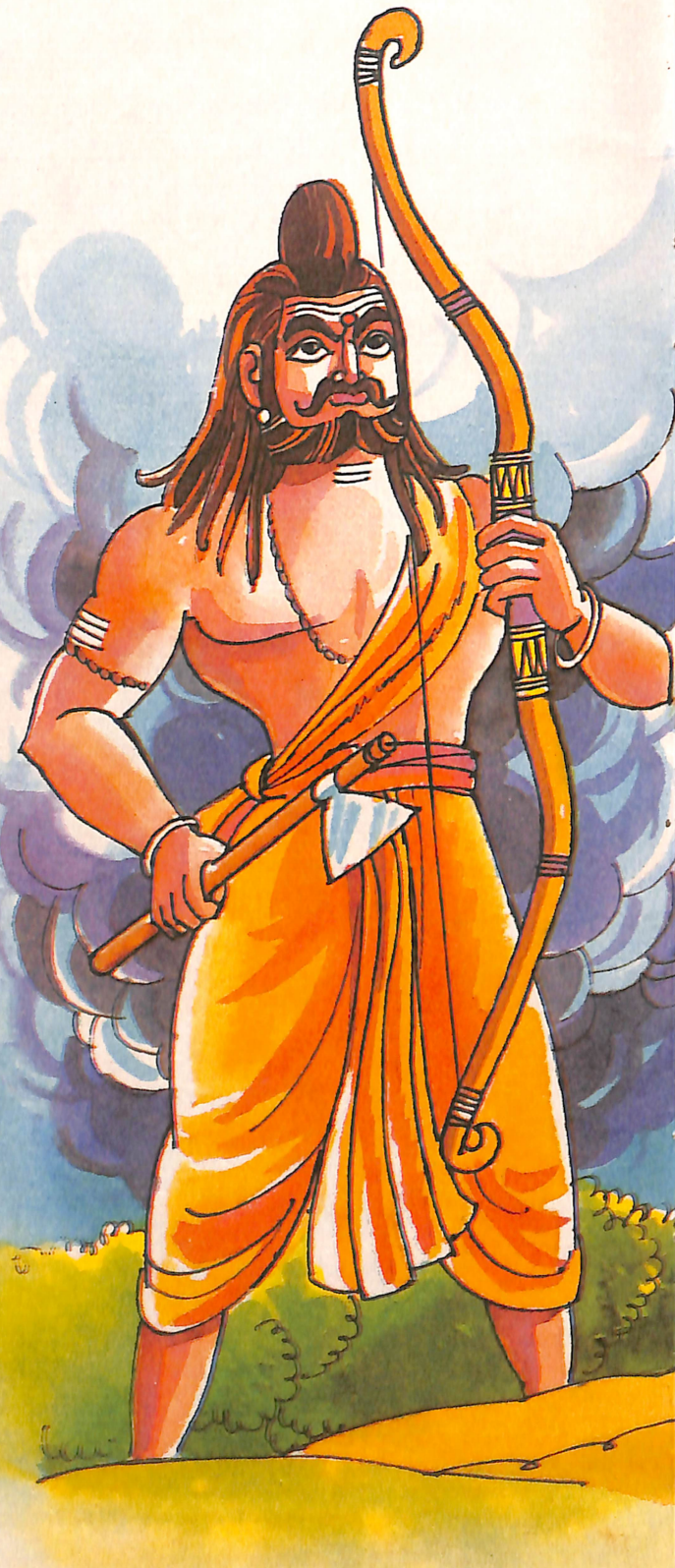
Out of the darkness, a terrible shape emerged, with fierce face and matted locks. It was Parashurama, sworn enemy of the *kshatriya*s, with a bow as powerful as Rudra's slung across his shoulders, and a battle-axe in one hand. In his other hand, he held an arrow that shone with the menace of lightning. The company was terror-stricken. Here was the feared son of Sage Jamadhagni, known to have slain generations of *kshatriya* warriors.

Rama reached for his bow instinctively.

"Father, who's this?"

Alarm written all over his face, Dasaratha said, "Son, this is Parashurama, who has vowed to destroy every living *kshatriya* because his father was killed by a king." Dasaratha quickly motioned to his people to receive Parashurama with every honour.



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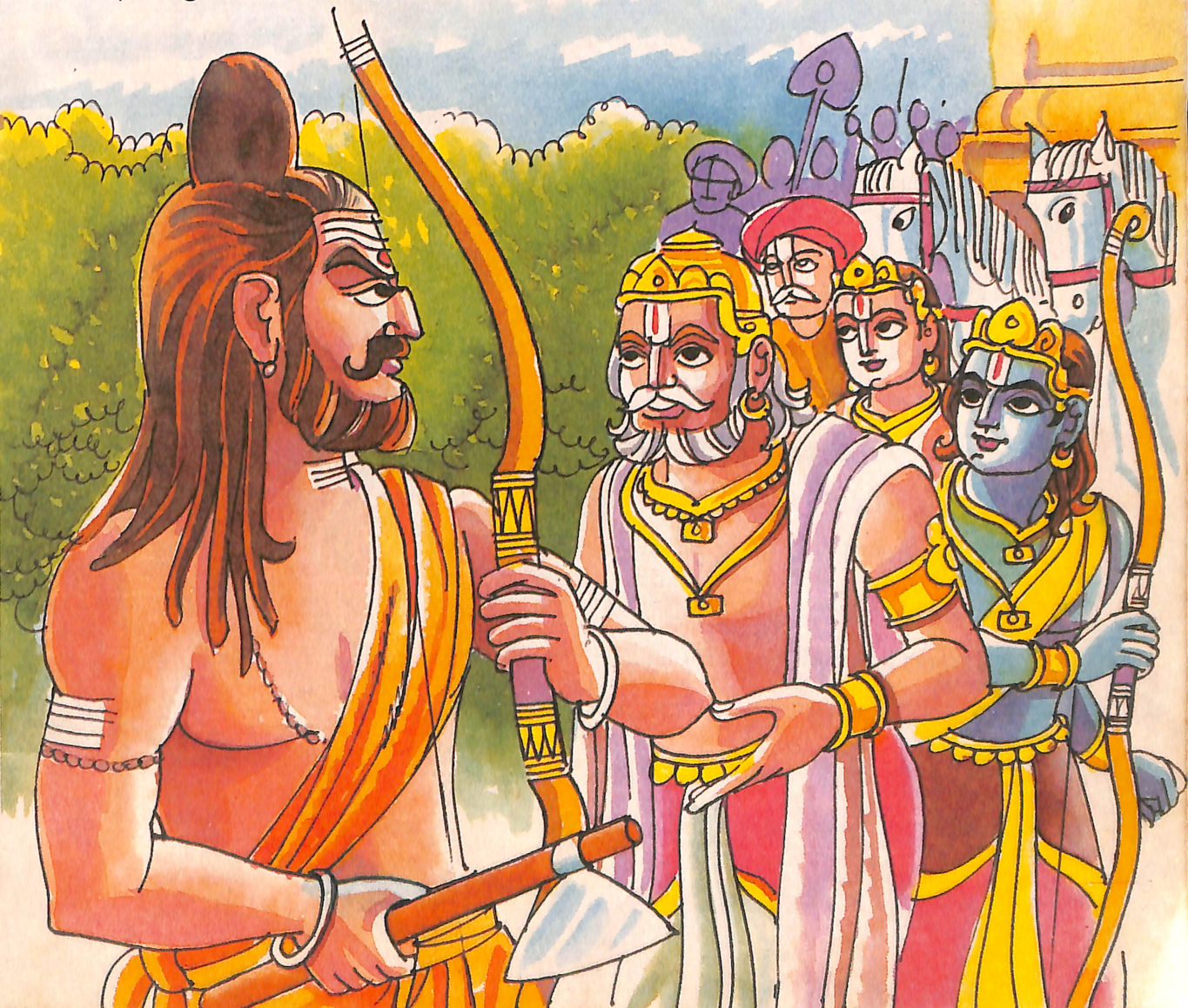
Parashurama said to Rama, "Son of Dasaratha, I was surprised to hear that you had strung and even broken the bow of Rudra at King Janaka's court. Here's another bow, equally powerful, given to my father by Lord Vishnu. If you can string this bow, you are a worthy opponent."

Dasaratha moved between the two quickly. Addressing Parashurama, he said, "O Son of Jamadhagni, I had hoped that your anger had cooled over the years. I had heard that you had returned to the *brahmin*'s life of prayer and penance after you promised the god Indra that you would shed no more *kshatriya* blood. I implore you not to challenge Rama who is young and has done you no harm. He is dearly beloved of us all."



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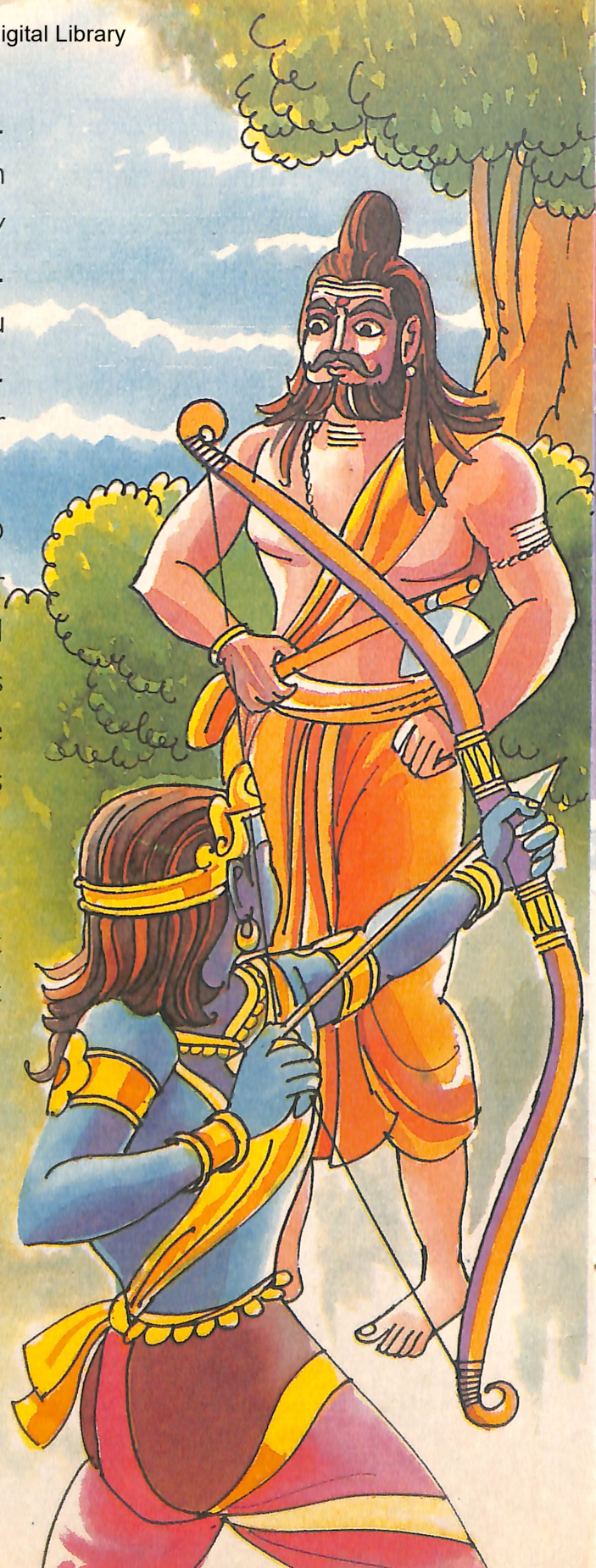
Parashurama ignored Dasaratha. Looking at Rama, he said, "Both these bows were originally made by Vishwakarma for Rudra and Vishnu. If you could break Rudra's bow, you should be able to break this one, too. If you can do it, I'll do you the honour of fighting with you."

Rama said, unruffled, "O Parashurama, I can understand your anger at your father's death. But I won't let you dismiss me as easily as the others you've challenged. Let me try my hand at stringing Vishnu's bow."

Parashurama gave Rama his bow. Rama strung it effortlessly, and set the arrow to it. Smiling at Parashurama, he said, "What would you like me to do with it now? A bow as powerful as this cannot be strung for no reason. Shall I use it to cripple you or to consume the spiritual merit you've gained through penance? Just say the word."



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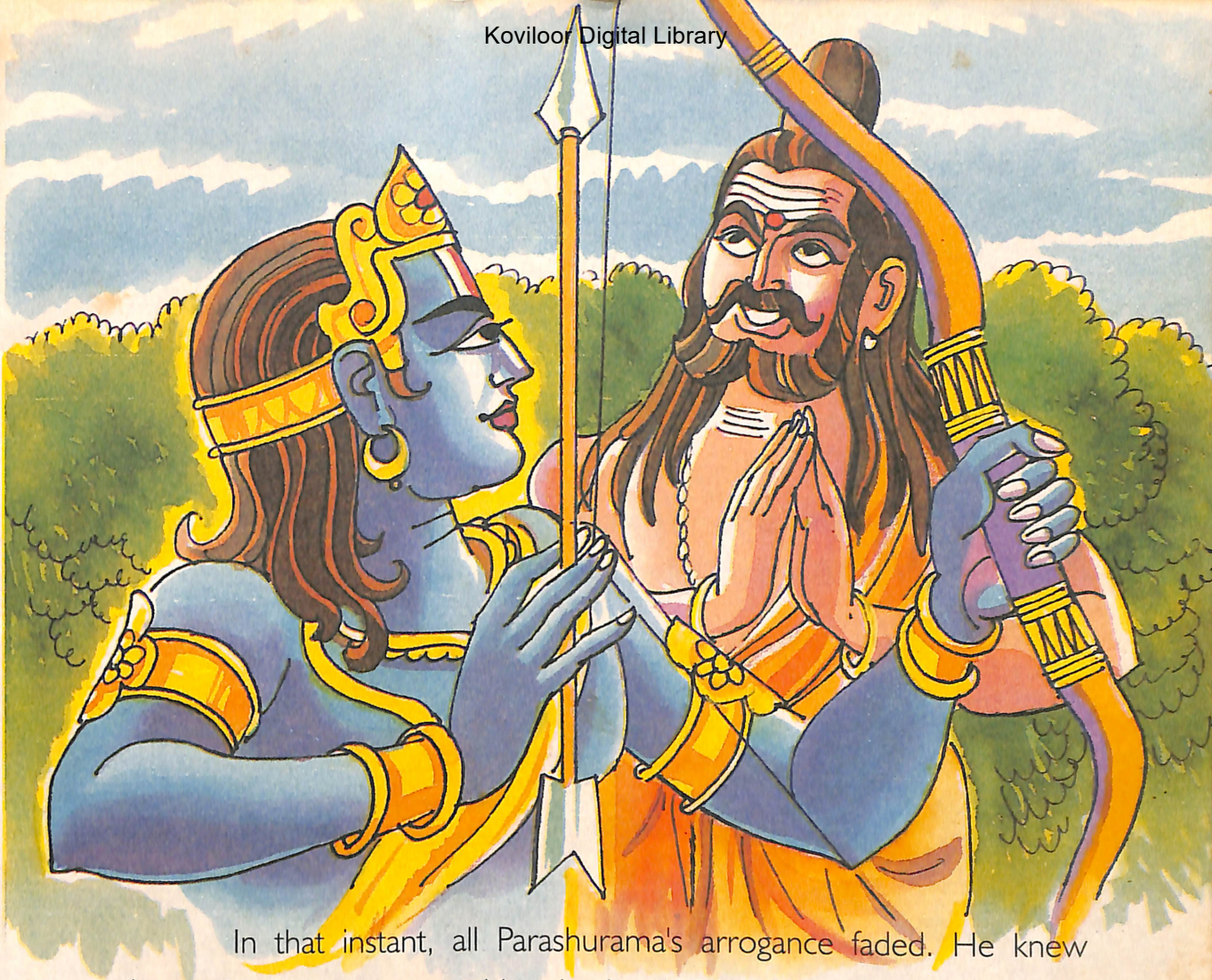

In that instant, all Parashurama's arrogance faded. He knew immediately that he was addressing Lord Vishnu himself. He said, mildly, "Now I know who you are. I'm honoured to be humbled by you. Please allow me to go to the Mahendra mountains. Destroy instead the merit I've earned through penance." Rama let fly his arrow. The next moment, Parashurama was gone. Dasaratha and his people were overjoyed. The company resumed its journey, reaching Ayodhya in a short while. There was great happiness and much festivity in the city at the return of the king and the princes.

Twelve years of perfect peace and prosperity passed. Rama and Seetha were very happy, growing closer and closer over the years. But soon things were to change.

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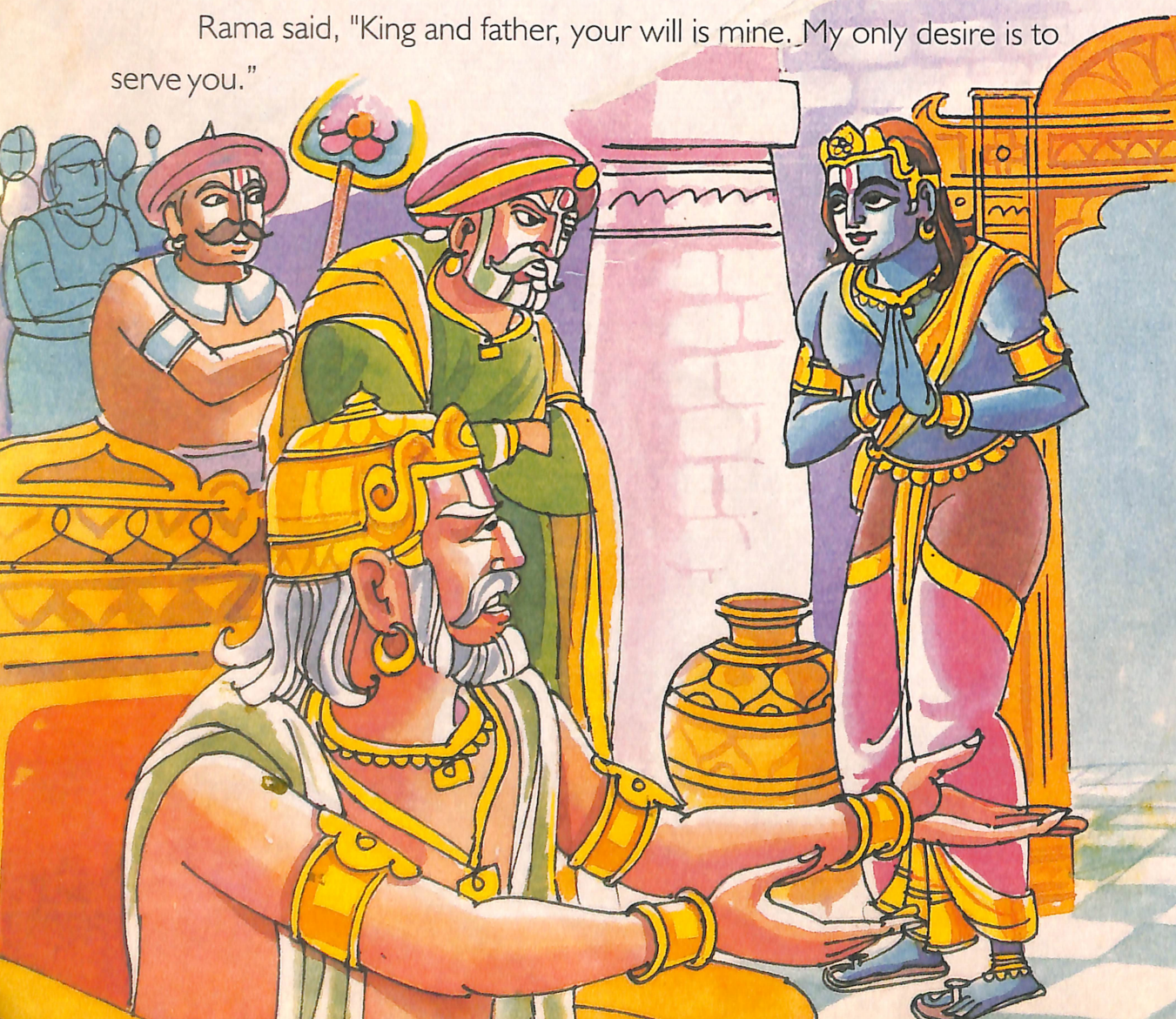
Since Rama was born, the king's fondest wish was to see his eldest son crowned. One day, Dasaratha decided that he was growing old. It was time to name his successor. Consulting his counsellors, he found them in agreement with him. The king asked Sumantra, one of his ministers, to go and fetch Rama.

When Rama arrived, the king embraced him tenderly. "My son," said Dasaratha, "I've summoned you here to tell you something very important. I want you to be my heir. I've been thinking about it for some time and feel that this is a good time for your coronation."

Rama said, "King and father, your will is mine. My only desire is to serve you."



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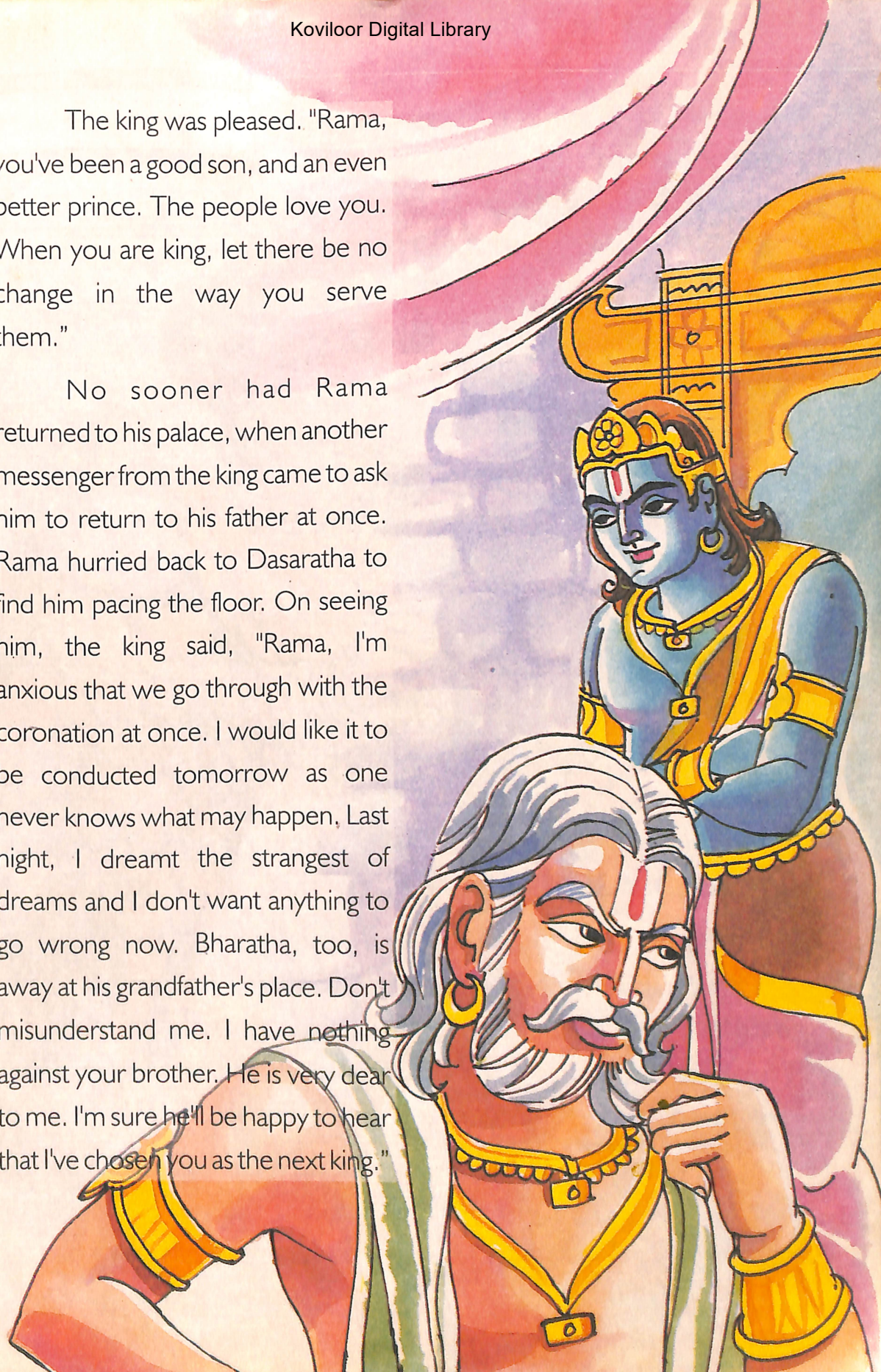
The king was pleased. "Rama, you've been a good son, and an even better prince. The people love you. When you are king, let there be no change in the way you serve them."

No sooner had Rama returned to his palace, when another messenger from the king came to ask him to return to his father at once. Rama hurried back to Dasaratha to find him pacing the floor. On seeing him, the king said, "Rama, I'm anxious that we go through with the coronation at once. I would like it to be conducted tomorrow as one never knows what may happen. Last night, I dreamt the strangest of dreams and I don't want anything to go wrong now. Bharatha, too, is away at his grandfather's place. Don't misunderstand me. I have nothing against your brother. He is very dear to me. I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that I've chosen you as the next king."



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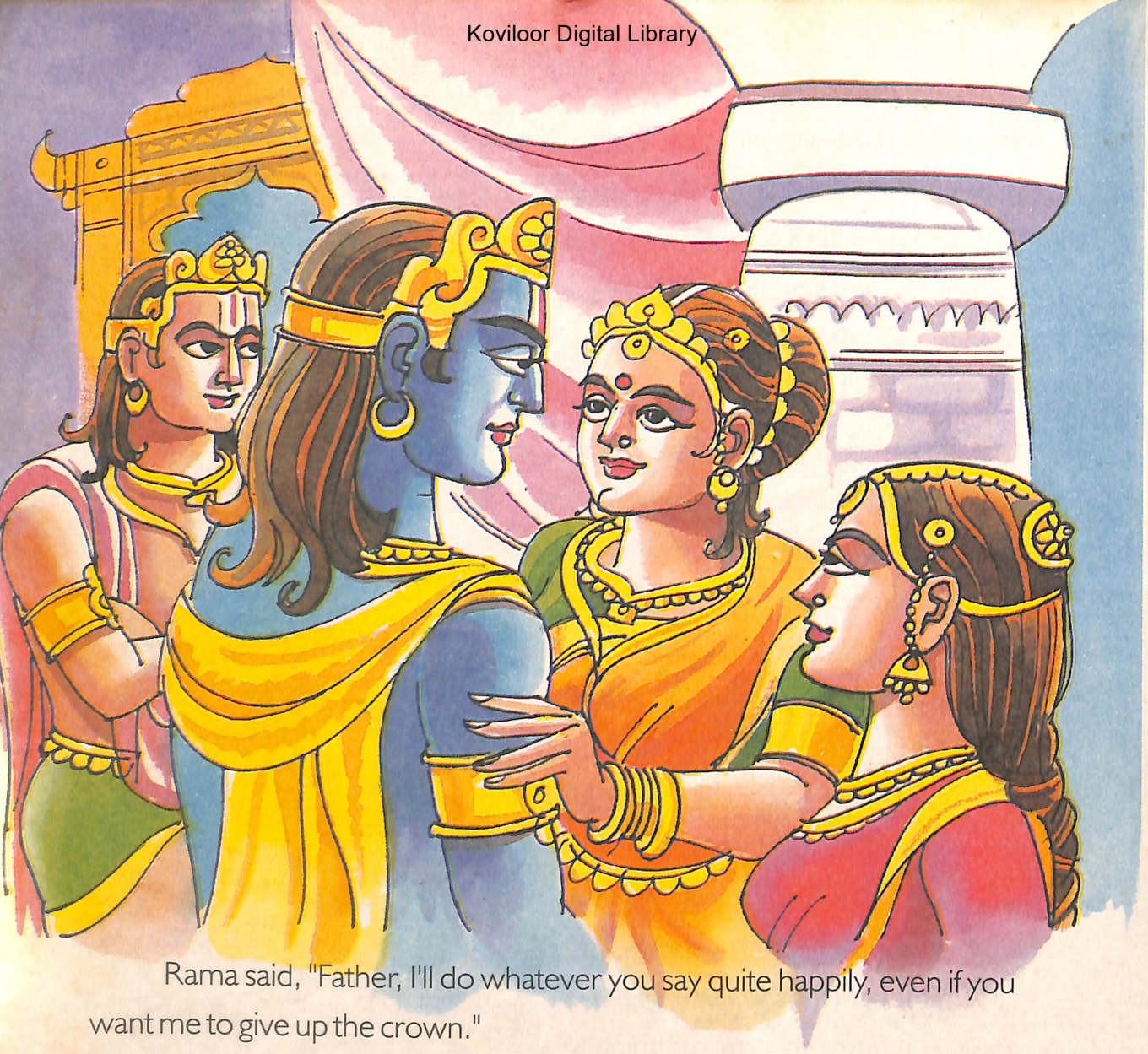

Rama said, "Father, I'll do whatever you say quite happily, even if you want me to give up the crown."

He went away to share the news with his mother, Queen Kausalya, and Seetha. His step-mother, Queen Sumitra and her son Lakshmana were with his mother. They received Rama's news with much joy. Kausalya said, "Rama, may you live long. I know you'll rule wisely and well over Kosala."

All through the city the excitement was mounting. The whole city had been decorated with flowers and festoons. The king was pleased to see so much warmth for Rama but deep inside he felt uneasy.

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Rama's youngest step-mother, Queen Kaikeyi, the mother of Bharatha, had a woman attendant called Mantara. Mantara was a hunchback, and distantly related to Kaikeyi. That evening, hearing the sound of festivity, Mantara went up to the terrace of the royal apartments to see what was happening in the city. Seeing another attendant nearby, Mantara said, "What's happening tonight in Ayodhya? Everyone seems to be in a celebratory mood."

The woman replied, "Haven't you heard? Prince Rama is to be made the *yuvaraja* tomorrow." Mantara frowned. It didn't seem as though Kaikeyi had known about this. Hurrying down to her mistress's apartments, Mantara burst in through the door to find a relaxed Kaikeyi stretched out on a bed.

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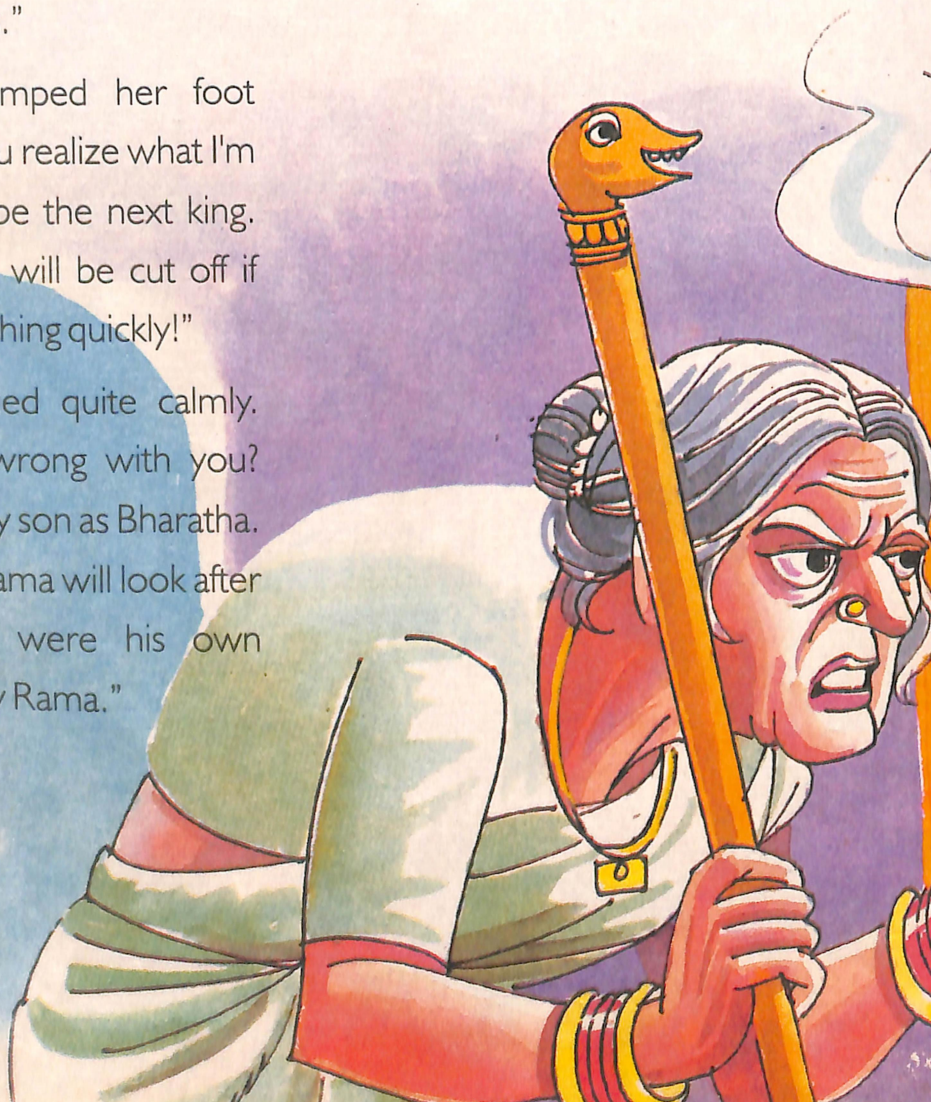
"O Queen," cried Mantara. "What are you doing, lying about? Did you know that Prince Rama's coronation is to take place tomorrow?"

Kaikeyi replied, in pleased surprise, "Is that so? I'm so happy to hear that my son Rama is to be made crown prince tomorrow. Here, take this gold necklace. You've brought me very good news."

Mantara stamped her foot impatiently. "Do you realize what I'm saying? Rama will be the next king. Your son Bharatha will be cut off if you don't do something quickly!"

Kaikeyi replied quite calmly. "Mantara, what's wrong with you? Rama is as much my son as Bharatha. When he is king, Rama will look after me as though I were his own mother. I know my Rama."



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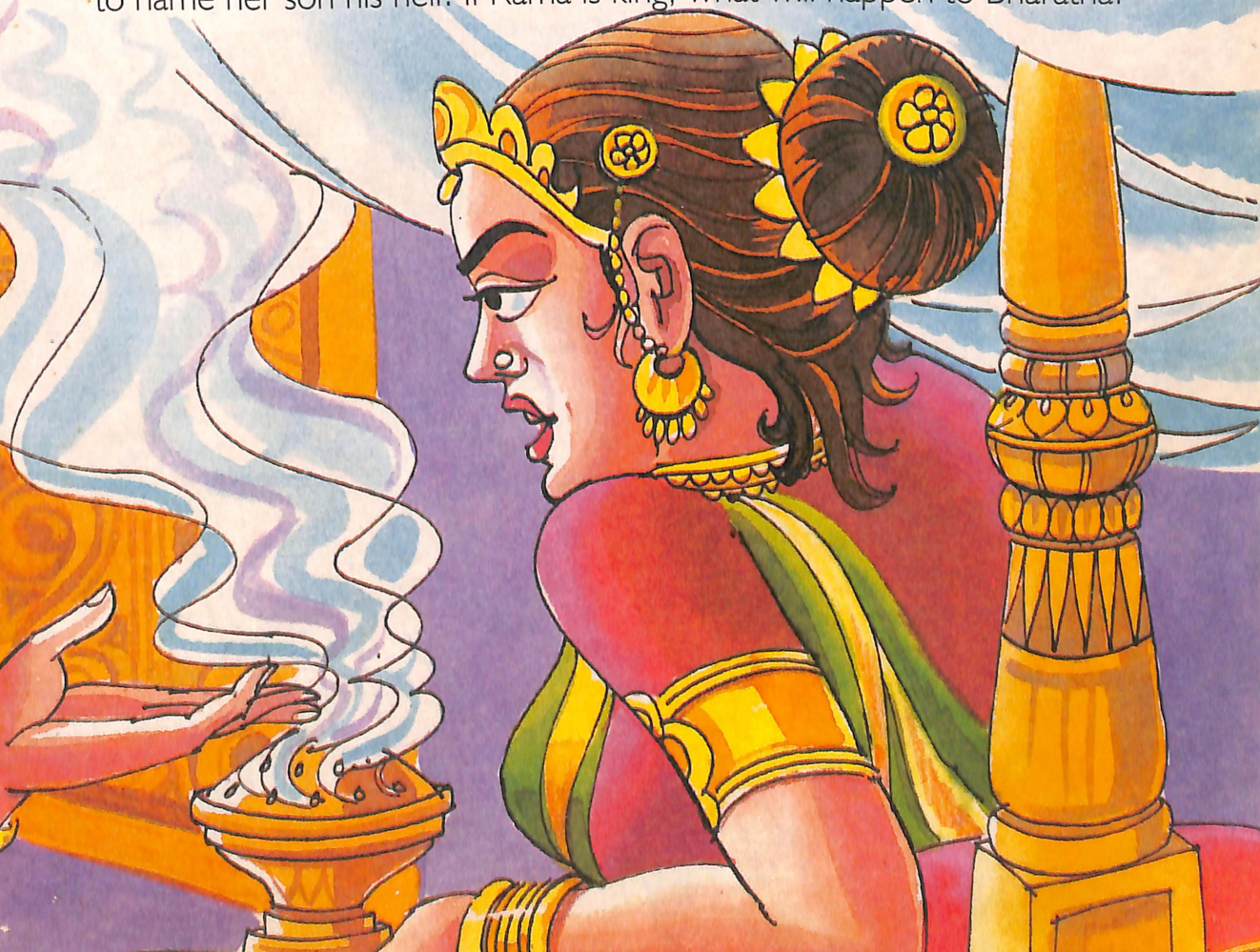
"O foolish queen," said Mantara, "I find it incredible that you're actually going to help the wily old king go against your own son. Think. Why has King Dasaratha chosen this moment when Bharatha is away to have Rama crowned if not to do him out?"

"Nonsense, Mantara," said Kaikeyi. "There is no need for you to slander the king. What can you know of statecraft? In any case, it makes little difference to me which of my sons is king. Let's have no more of this conversation."

Mantara said, tearing her hair, "What can I say to make you understand? You have to stop being so naive. Realize that it is your rival, Queen Kausalya, who is behind this. It is she who has persuaded the king to name her son his heir. If Rama is king, what will happen to Bharatha?



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Rama will never trust him, and is bound to find some reason to get rid of him. Such is the way of kings."

While Mantara was speaking, Kaikeyi had been thinking. What if Mantara proved to be right? Should she not safeguard the interests of Bharatha while he was away? Maybe he would even blame her when he came back. No, no, Bharatha was not like that at all. He loved Rama dearly. Yet... Some faint memory began to stir in the queen's mind.

When Kaikeyi had married Dasaratha, the king had been desperate for an heir. Kaikeyi's father had made Dasaratha promise that his grandson would one day be king. Dasaratha had not known then that his first wife,

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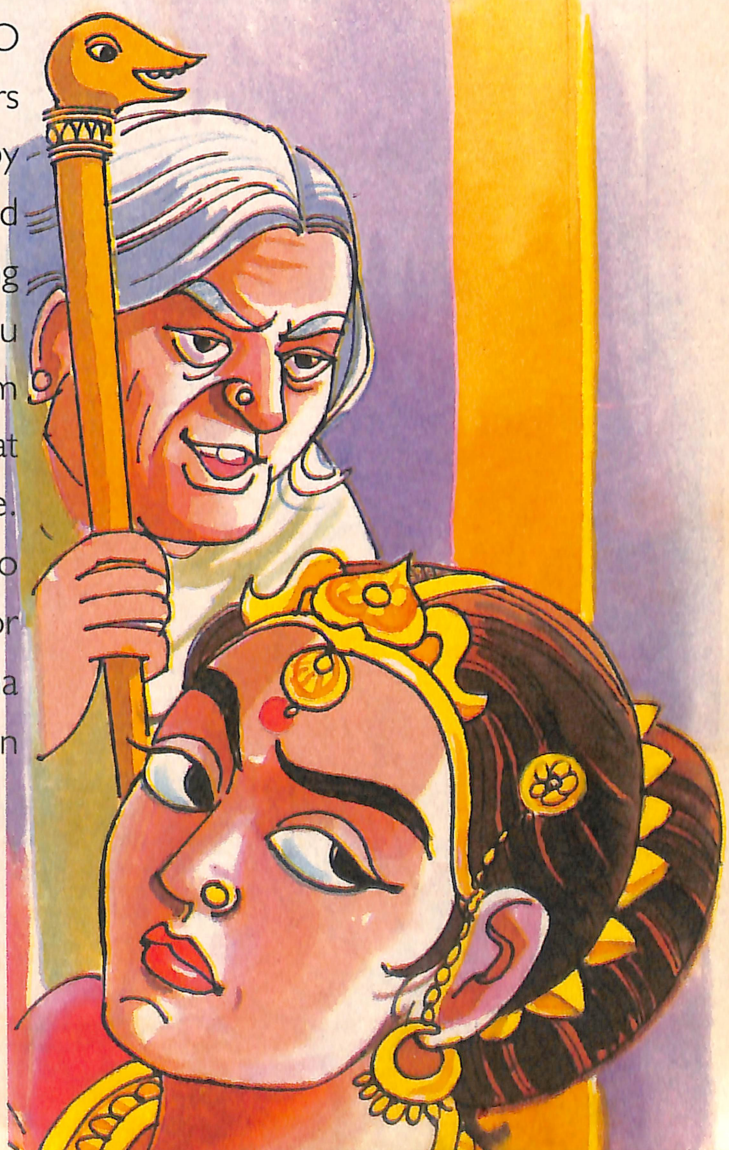
Kausalya, would have a son at the same time as Kaikeyi. Over the years, everyone, including Kaikeyi herself, had forgotten about this promise. Now Kaikeyi looked at Mantara, confused.

Mantara saw at once that the doubts she had sown in the queen had taken root. Here was the chance to make herself indispensable to Kaikeyi. Thinking quickly, she said, "O Queen, do you remember, years ago, you saved the king's life by driving him away from the battlefield when he was wounded? The king offered you two wishes then but you decided to save them for later. Claim those now. Let your first wish be that Bharatha is made the crown prince. For your second wish, ask the king to send his son Rama to the forest for fourteen years. In that time, Bharatha will be able to make his own position stable."



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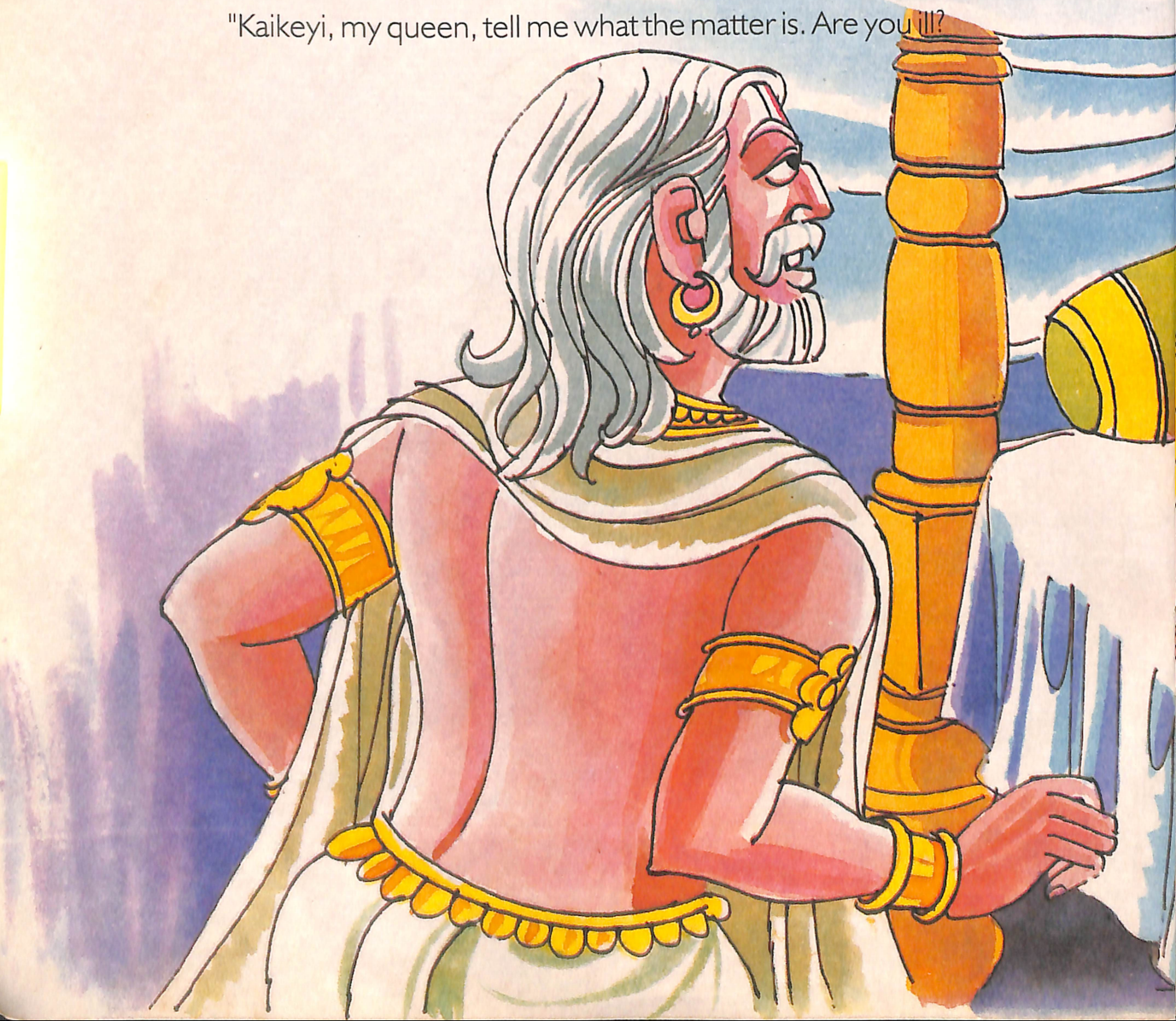
"To the forest!" exclaimed Kaikeyi. "How can I do that to Rama?" Mantara was silent. "But how should I approach the king? What shall I say?"

"Here's what you should do," said Mantara. "Go, wear your shabbiest clothes, take off your jewels, and lie on the floor. Don't acknowledge the king when he comes to visit you. He won't be able to bear it. Ask him for your two wishes."

When the king entered Kaikeyi's apartments a little later, he couldn't find her. An attendant told him that the queen was very angry and was resting in an inner room. The king rushed in but Kaikeyi ignored him.

"Kaikeyi, my queen, tell me what the matter is. Are you ill?



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Has anyone hurt or offended you in any way?" Kaikeyi sighed but returned no answer. Dasaratha kept begging to be told what was wrong. Still Kaikeyi said nothing, till Dasaratha assured her that she would have whatever she wished, if only he could see her happy again. Then she said, "There is something I want that only you can give me. But I will not ask it of you and be refused."

Dasaratha said, "You have only to tell me, and you know it will be done."

The queen said, "Promise me in the name of Rama!"

Dasaratha replied, quite unconscious of any danger, "I swear on Rama."

Kaikeyi said, "Very well, then. Do you remember, many years ago, when you were wounded in battle, I drove your chariot away to save you? At that time, you offered me two boons. I want to claim them now."

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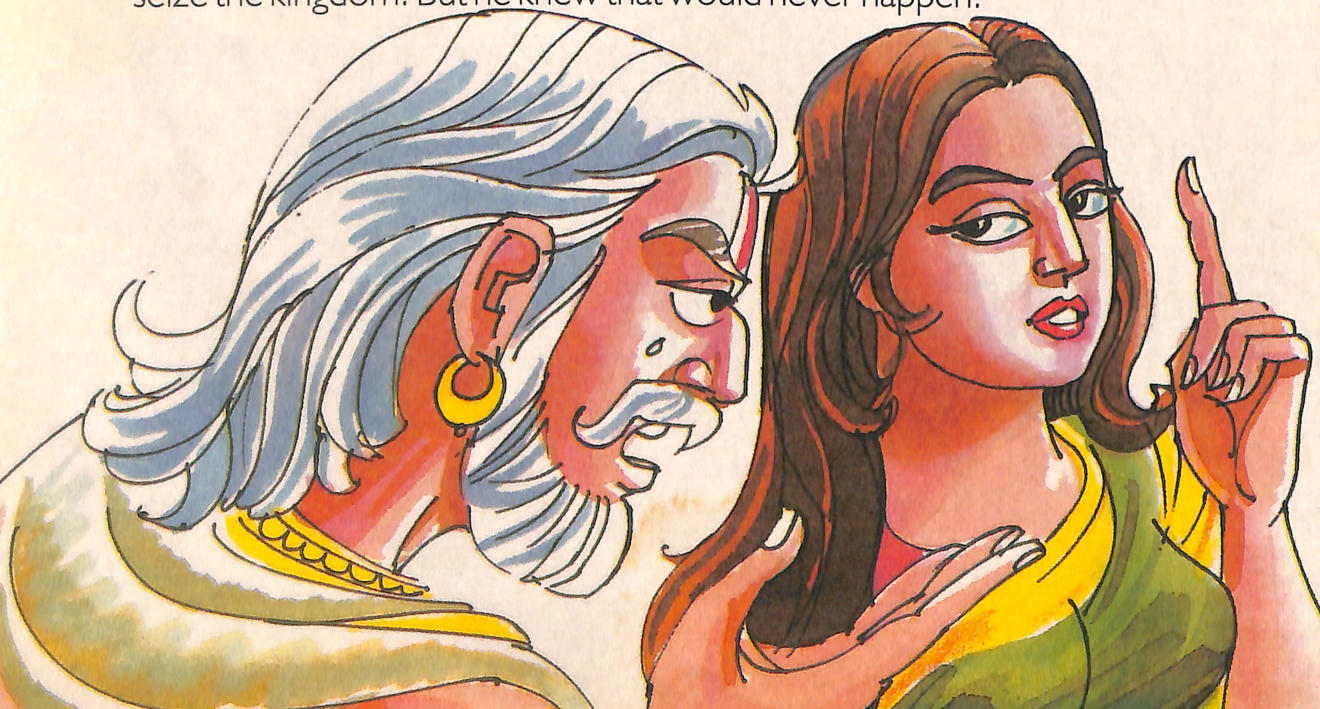
"My Queen," said the king, "Ask me whatever you wish."

Kaikeyi looked at Dasaratha steadily. She said, "Remember your vow to me, made in the name of Rama. My first wish is this: make my son Bharatha king instead of Rama. For my second wish, I want Rama to go to the forest for fourteen years. Don't break your word now!"

Dasaratha was struck with horror. Could he believe his ears? Oh Rama, Rama, was this some hideous nightmare? These cruel words out of the mouth of his beloved Kaikeyi? Despair was quickly followed by tremendous anger.

"Kaikeyi, what have I or Rama ever done to you that you can be so heartless? Would you break my heart without a qualm? How can you hurt Rama, who has looked upon you as his own mother? Don't make me do this. Ask for anything else in this kingdom, and it is yours. Save my Rama!"

But the queen was unmoved. "Enough of this. Summon Rama at daybreak so you can give him the news." Dasaratha was heart-broken. All night long, he clung to the faint hope that Rama would disobey him and seize the kingdom. But he knew that would never happen.



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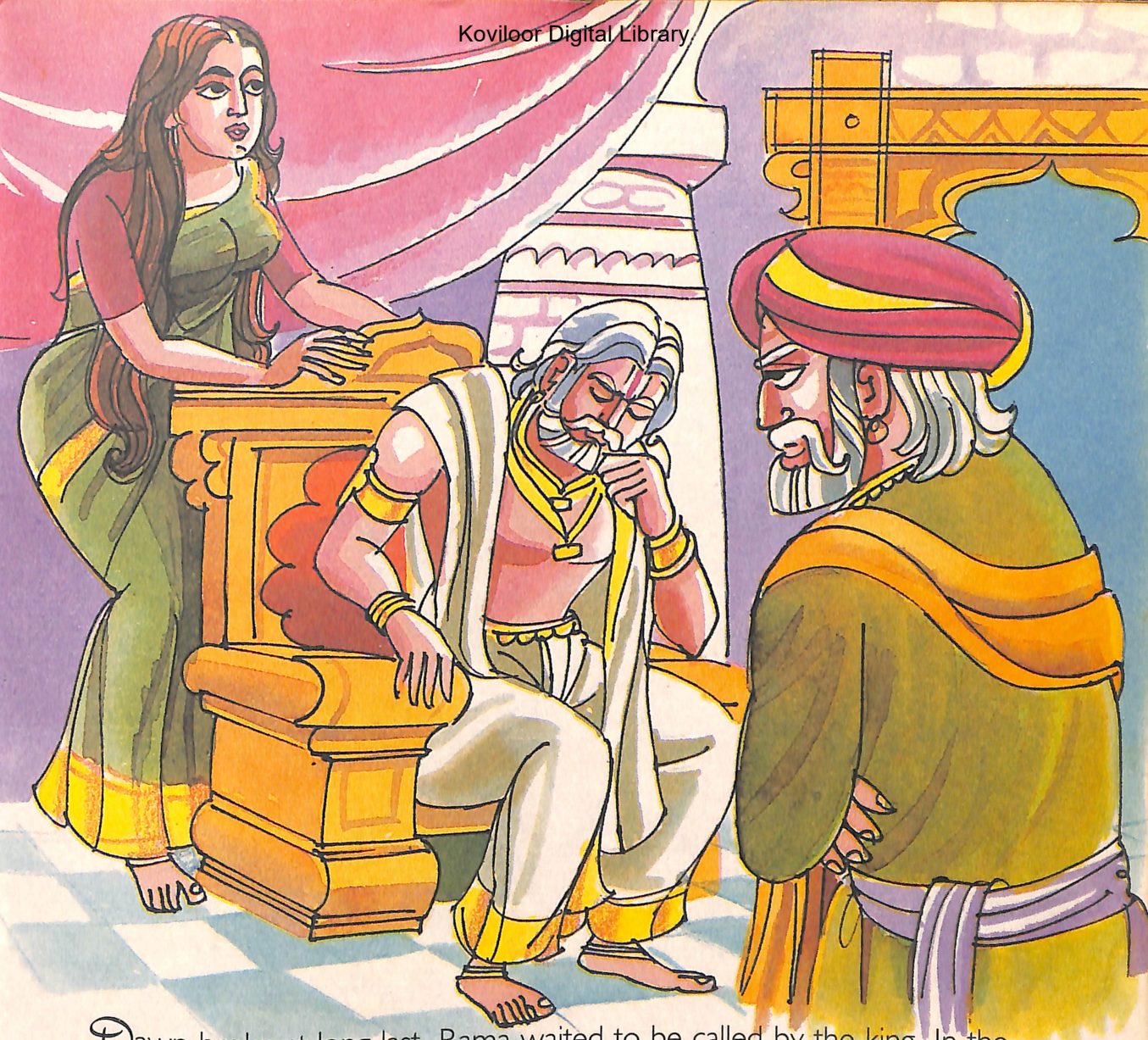

Dawn broke at long last. Rama waited to be called by the king. In the meantime, Sumantra, coming to rouse the king, found him staring sightlessly in front of him. At Sumantra's entrance, Dasaratha started from his trance, looking mutely at his minister. Intervening quickly, Kaikeyi said, "The king has not slept all night, thinking about the coronation. Please go now and bring Rama to him." Puzzled, Sumantra went away to fetch Rama.

Outside, the crowd that had gathered to witness the coronation grew restless. Why this delay in the start of the ceremonies?

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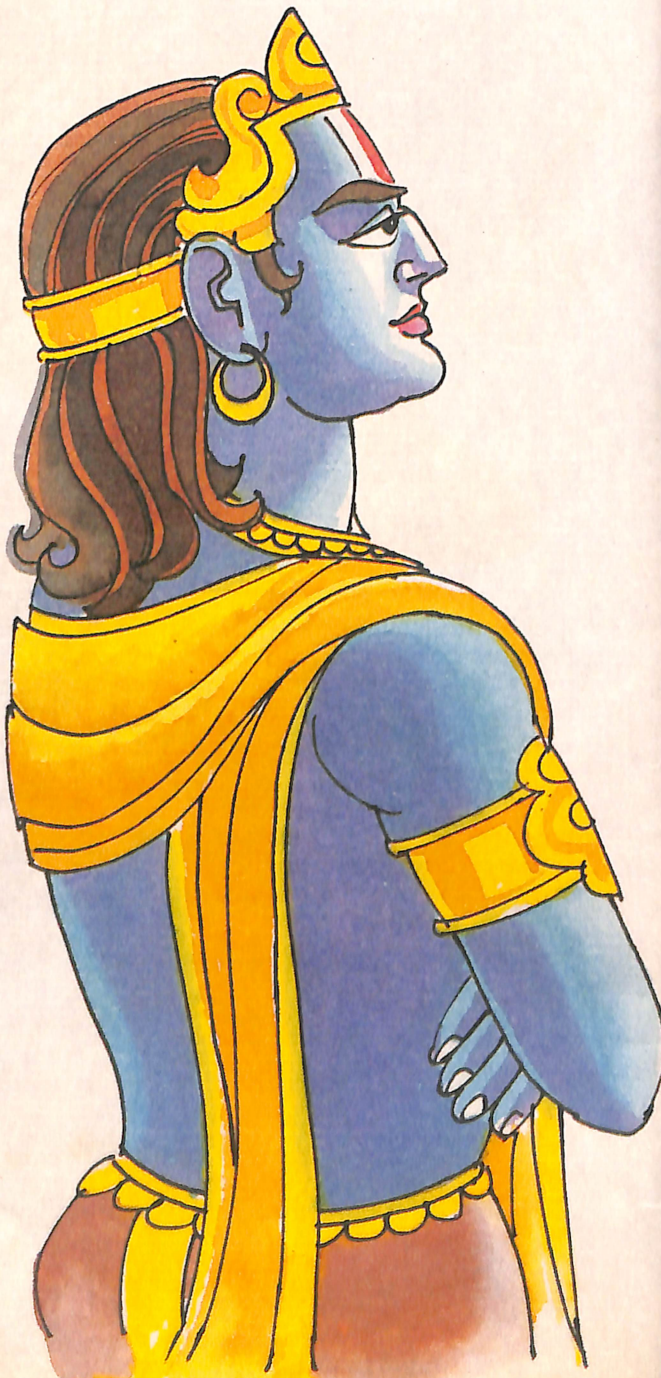
Several people tried to stop Sumantra to ask him when the coronation would begin. The minister managed to bring Rama to Kaikeyi's apartments with great difficulty. When Rama entered, he was stunned to see his father with his head in his hands. Dasaratha looked up at him in silent anguish. Turning to Kaikeyi in fear, Rama said, "Mother, is my father ill, or is he angry with me? Why doesn't he speak to me? Please tell me what's wrong."

Looking Rama in the eye, Kaikeyi said, "Your father is neither ill nor angry. But he has something which he's afraid to tell you. So I must



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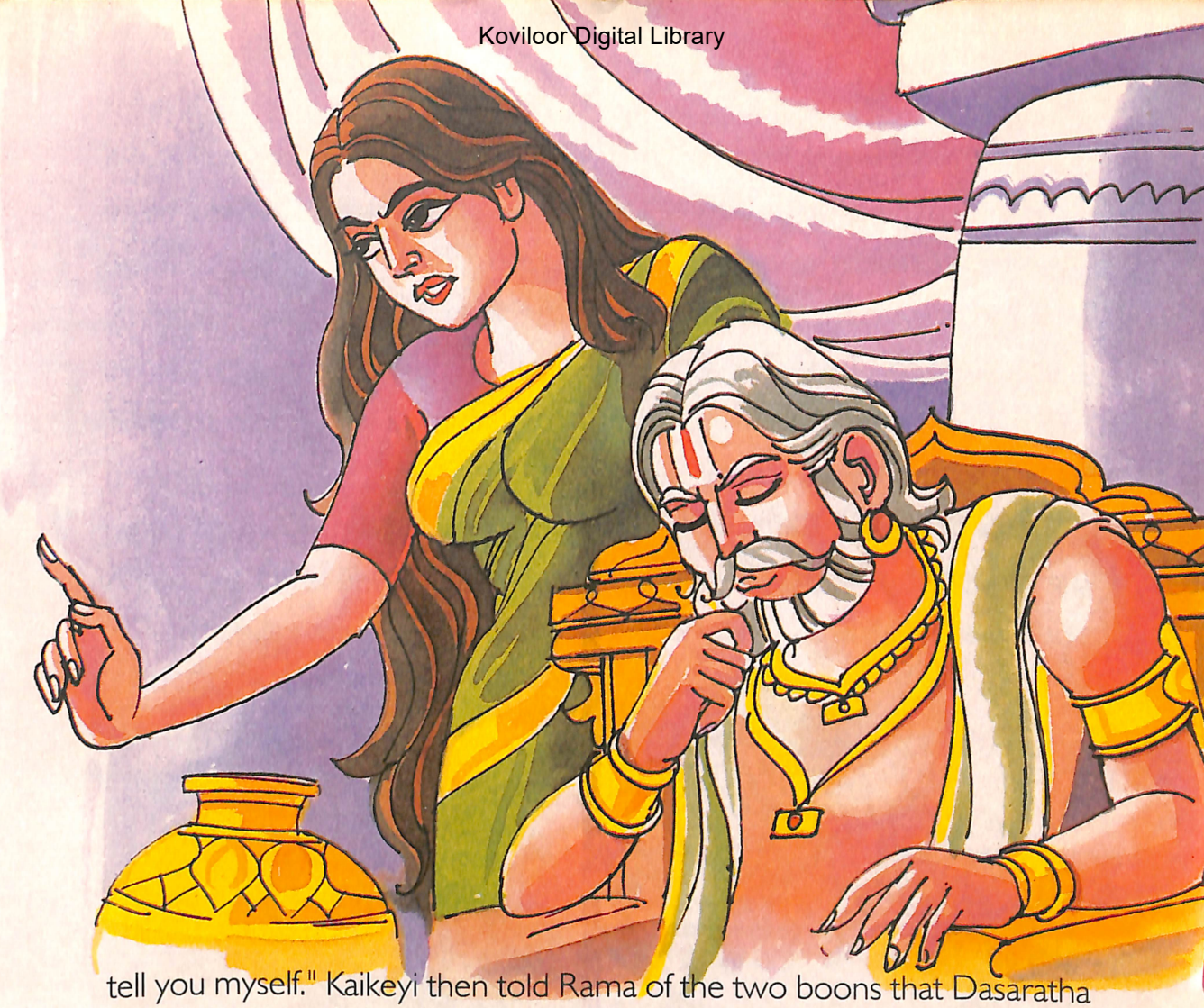

tell you myself." Kaikeyi then told Rama of the two boons that Dasaratha had once granted her which she was claiming now. She told Rama what they were.

There was no disappointment in Rama's face. "Is that all, mother? Why is my father afraid to tell me this? He knows that I would never allow him to break a promise because of me. Let Bharatha be crowned at once, and I will go this very day to the forest. I'll do anything so long as my father is all right again." Dasaratha's last hope was gone. Queen Kaikeyi, wanting to hurry Rama out of her apartments, said, "Rama, you have proved to be as dutiful as ever. See that you leave immediately."

Outside, Rama found an angry Lakshmana waiting for him.

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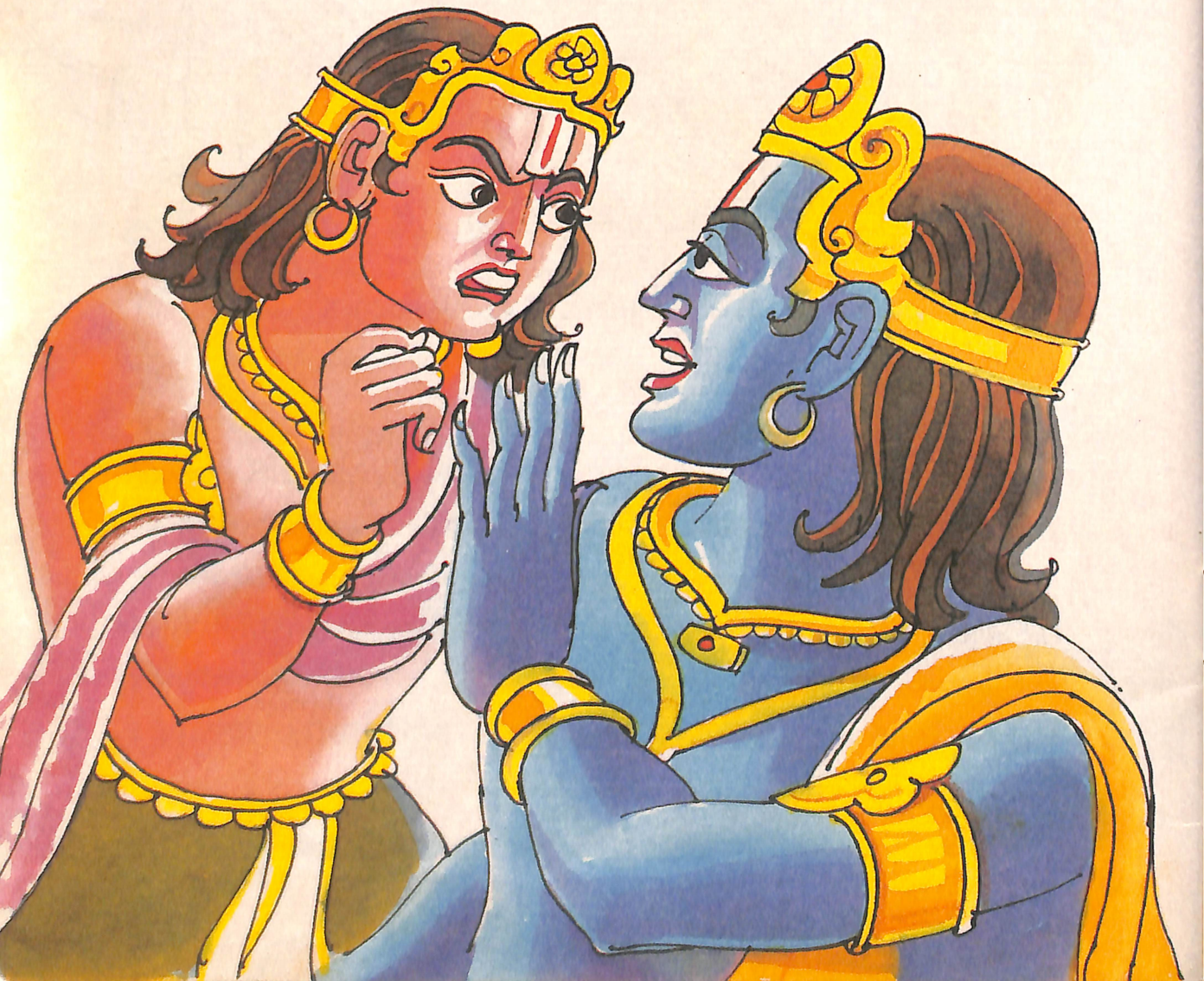
"Say the word, brother, and I will seize the kingdom for you!" Rama tried to calm his brother down. "Lakshmana, please give up all thoughts of violence. Let us do everything to make our old father all right again. Come with me now to my mother, so that I can give her the news." So saying, Rama went to Queen Kausalya's apartments. He broke the news to his mother. "O Rama," she cried, "How can I bear this? How will Seetha bear this? O, what shall we do? I will go to the forest as well!" Taking her hands in his to comfort her, Rama said, "Mother, please be calm. You can't come with me to the forest. Your duty is beside the king. He is old and needs you." But Kausalya could not be consoled. Rama then went to Seetha.



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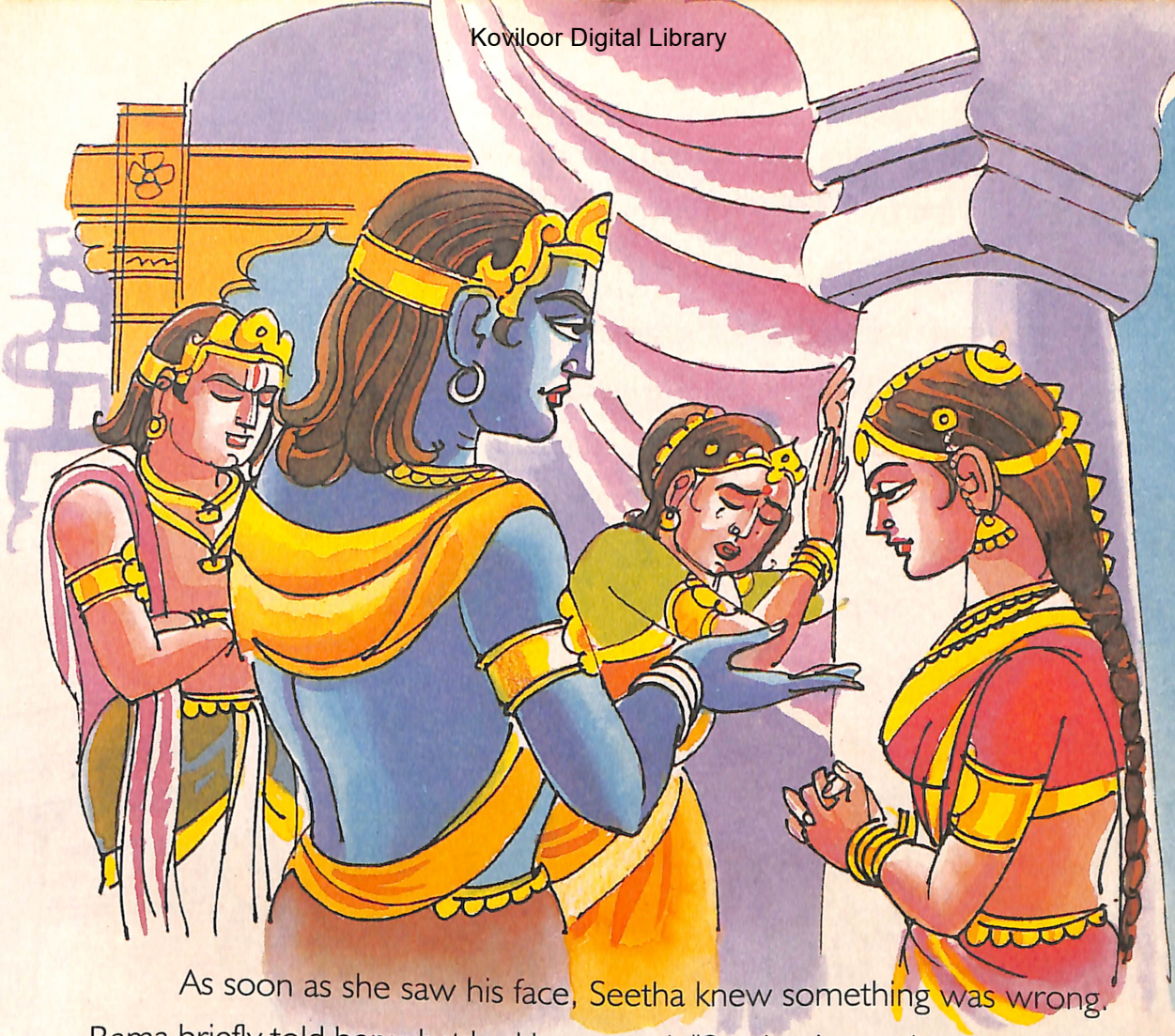

As soon as she saw his face, Seetha knew something was wrong. Rama briefly told her what had happened. "Seetha, I must leave at once. Fourteen years seem like a long time but, believe me, they will go past in a flash." The usually gentle Seetha lashed out at her husband. "Fourteen years! You expect me to remain here without you for fourteen years? I'd rather be dead. If you go to the forest, then I go with you. There will be no argument about this." Rama didn't know whether to be happy or sad at his wife's resolve. As Seetha was speaking, Lakshmana had entered. Now he said, "I, too, will go with you. I cannot let the two of you go alone."

Rama said, "It is time then for us to give up our rich clothes and wear garments that befit forest-dwellers. Let us leave quickly and quietly so that the people of Ayodhya don't realize what has happened."

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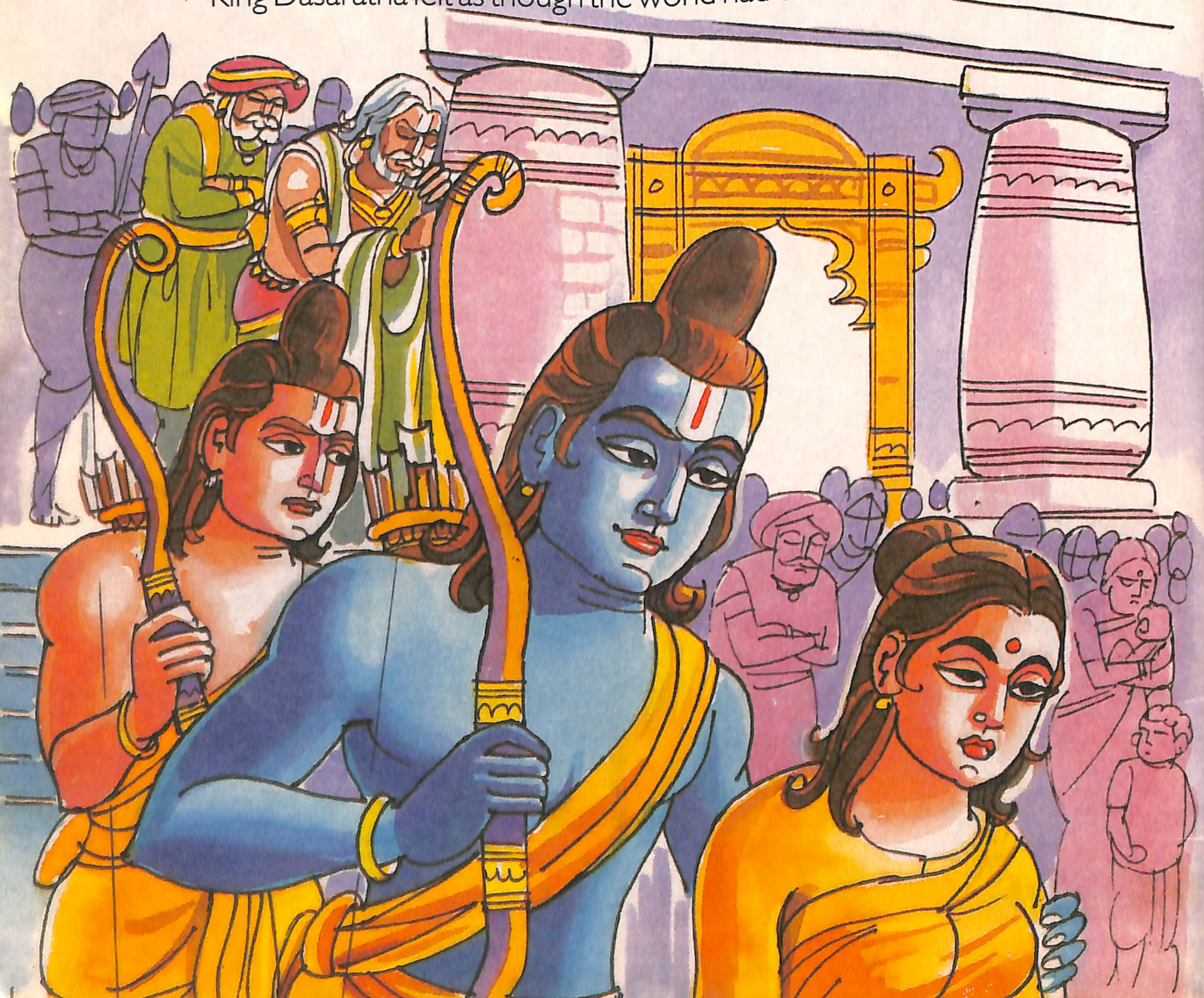
But the news had spread already, and the people were grief-stricken. The crowd followed Rama, Seetha and Lakshmana as they made their way to the king's palace to bid him goodbye.

When he saw Rama, Dasaratha rushed to him and hugged him as though he would never let him go. Rama gently disengaged himself. Speaking cheerfully he said, "I am going now, father. Seetha and Lakshmana have decided to come with me. Don't be unhappy. You know I would do anything for you. Please look after yourself. Goodbye, my king. " Rama and his companions got into their chariot and drove away.

King Dasaratha felt as though the world had come to an end.



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scudded	move straight and quickly
retinue	group of attendants
kshatriya	member of the warrior caste
brahmin	member of the priestly caste
implore	plead with
unruffled	calm
coronation	ceremony in which a king is crowned
hunchback	person with a deformed back
celebratory	festive or merry
yuvaraja	crown prince
wily	cunning
slander	make false statements about someone
statecraft	the art of government
indispensable	absolutely essential
hideous nightmare	bad dream
rouse	wake up
anguish	severe pain (here, mental)
consoled	comforted
resolve	decision

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The Illustrated RAMAYANA

Rama Exiled

Legend has it that the sage Valmiki wrote the *Ramayana* when Prince Rama was still alive. One day, centuries ago, the divine sage Narada came to visit Valmiki.

"O Fount of Wisdom," said Valmiki, "Who is the bravest, most virtuous man alive?"

Replied Narada, "Why, Prince Rama of Ayodhya, of course!"

Narada then narrated the story of Rama of the Ikshvakus, who was really Lord Vishnu, born on earth to save the world from demons. Valmiki was so fascinated by this tale, he decided to write it down.

Over the generations, Valmiki's *Ramayana* has become one of India's best-loved tales. Fierce battles and heroic deeds, great acts of love and friendship as well as of wickedness and betrayal, powerful divine weapons and journeys across land and sea and through the air, an army composed entirely of monkeys, even a bridge across the sea–the *Ramayana* has it all, in a splendid mix of gods, demons and humans.

Read about the adventures of Rama, Seetha and Lakshmana, retold here in a simple fashion, and beautifully illustrated by the eminent children's illustrator and cartoonist, Bujjai. *Rama Exiled* is the second in a series of 8 books.

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